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Opinion

Allen Mendenhall: Are DEI policies making workplaces less safe?

[Allen Mendenhall](#) | 08.01.25



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Being a lifetime member of the National Association of Scholars means that four times a year, I walk to my mailbox with particular anticipation, hoping to find the latest "Academic Questions." The July heat is merciless – by the time I reach the mailbox, my shirt clings to my skin – but such discomfort vanished this week when I discovered the summer issue waiting like a small gift.

Nestled within its pages was a bold and fascinating article: "Study: DEI Policies Can Make the Workplace Less Safe," by Emre Kuvvet. It's the sort of piece you'd expect to be smothered before reaching peer review: provocative, data-driven, and unflinching in its conclusions about the unintended consequences of corporate diversity policies.

I'm not a quantitative researcher, nor do I conduct empirical work. So, my summary here is necessarily limited, and I won't delve into the methodology. But for those inclined to scrutinize the data and regressions, the article is [publicly available](#) and worth your time. The findings are compelling.

The study, Kuvvet writes, "examines how corporate diversity initiatives affect workplace safety" and uncovers "a strong positive association between companies' commitment to diversity and workplace accidents and lost workdays." Put simply, the more aggressively a company pursues DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) initiatives, the more likely it is to experience safety problems.

Kuvvet's data suggest that diversity policies may actually be contributing to an increase in workplace injuries, fatalities, and lost productivity. As he puts it, "our findings reveal a substantial positive association between diversity initiatives and workplace accidents." This isn't just about internal HR metrics; it's a matter of human lives, legal liabilities, and economic cost.

It gets worse. The study finds that "as companies enhance their diversity initiatives, they experience a rise in consumer complaints related to customer health and safety," and that these companies are more likely to face "controversies related to the quality or responsibility of their products and services." DEI

commitments, it appears, are correlated with delays, product recalls and declines in customer satisfaction.

That last point is especially striking: Diversity initiatives, Kuvvet notes, are associated with “a significant decrease in customer satisfaction levels.” And they don’t seem to be boosting morale internally either. On the contrary, the results show “higher diversity commitments are associated with lower employee satisfaction and increased management turnover.”

Why? The study suggests one possibility: employees may feel that promotions and opportunities are being awarded to fulfill diversity targets rather than based on merit. That perception, even if unintended, undermines trust, erodes motivation, and diverts attention from core priorities such as safety and performance.

In light of these findings, one is tempted to ask whether the best course of action for companies would be to abandon DEI programming altogether and stop hiring, firing or promoting based on race or identity. Focus on merit and performance metrics. Set clear, objective standards. Let fairness – not favoritism – guide decision-making.

If diversity is a good, as so many believe, then something is going badly wrong in the way we’re pursuing it.

Perhaps the issue isn’t diversity itself but the definition and application of it. Consider the Christian church: in terms of race, national origin, and global reach, it is arguably the most diverse institution on Earth. Yet its unity comes not from trying to be inclusive for the sake of inclusivity, but from its clear and exclusive theological commitments. Anyone is welcome, but not everyone is right. In that paradox – open to all, yet unyielding in belief – there may be a lesson for how institutions pursue diversity without compromising excellence.

If we are serious about building safer workplaces and more successful companies, we need to stop asking how diverse our teams look and start asking how well our people work. That may not win applause in elite circles. But as this study suggests, it might just save lives.

Allen Mendenhall is a Senior Advisor for the Capital Markets Initiative at the Heritage Foundation. A lawyer with a Ph.D. in English from Auburn University, he has taught at multiple colleges and universities across Alabama and is the author or editor of nine books. Learn more at AllenMendenhall.com.

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